

Spassky an admirer of Bobby Fischer

By TOM ZUPPA

News Staff Writer

FRAMINGHAM — The speaker was Boris Spassky, but the questions kept coming back to Bobby Fischer.

"We were very friendly," Spassky said in a lecture at Framingham State College Sunday, debunking the myth that the pair's 1972 match for the world chess championship was a blood feud.

"I admired the way he played." For the 130 people who jammed the student center conference room, the lecture was a way of reliving the match, perhaps the most widely publicized chess match of all time. In a wide-ranging two-hour talk, Spassky analyzed a recent game, talked about his life and said he is thinking about another run for the world crown.

While Spassky, 47, has won many tournaments since losing the title, Fischer has gone another route. He has not played in public since the Spassky match and was stripped of his title in 1975, when he refused to defend against current champion Anatoly Karpov in a dispute over match conditions.

He is now a recluse living in Pasadena, Calif. "I feel a lot for him," Spassky said. "It is a very tragic situation."

Asked if he had talked to Fischer, Spassky said he had on two occa-

sions and had sent him a telegram on his 40th birthday last year. He refused to say any more, saying the matter is a "personal question."

Spassky and Fischer first crossed paths in the Moscow Chess Club in 1958 and faced each other in a tournament two years later. While Fischer was fighting with organizers, Spassky won the world championship in 1969.

Three years later they faced off in Reykjavik, Iceland, the two strongest players of their era.

Because he was a world champion facing an American, Spassky received special privileges, such as a four-room apartment. "That's a treasure for a player in the Soviet Union, so I was very thankful for Bobby," he said.

Spassky joked that, in appreciation, he had bought 20 bottles of vodka for Fischer but that his analysis team started drinking it when the match got tight.

He said that, when he lost the third match game to Fischer — the first game Fischer ever won from him — it gave Fischer almost unstoppable momentum. "It was like I opened a bottle and a genie came out," he said.

He said that he could have won four straight games at one point but did not win a single one because he was so drained from the pre-match wrangling over the playing site and prize fund.

"In the decisive moments, I could do nothing," he said, shaking his hands nervously.

Spassky won just one more game, losing 12½-8½, and was severely reprimanded when he returned home.

"The title was a state property. They all said I was a very, very bad boy," he said in a mock serious tone. "They didn't realize Bobby was the stronger player."

He said he was "relaxed" after losing the title because being champion was a burden. "I was not a happy man; I felt I had to do something special, kiss some babies, because chess is so important to life in the Soviet Union," he said.

Spassky has lived in France since 1976 with his third wife but

still represented the Soviet Union at tournaments. He broke those ties recently, became a French citizen and will play for France in the chess Olympiad in Greece in November.

While Spassky refused to take audience questions on the reasons for his decision, he said the Soviet Sport Committee "treated me very badly," including refusing to let him back into the country.

"I was humiliated," he said. "Now I play White, they play Black, and I play for France."

Later Spassky played 29 players at once, losing to John Slopa of Cambridge and drawing Jack Young of Marlboro and Rolf Wetzel of Acton. The event was sponsored by the Billerica and Framingham chess clubs.



CHESS CHAMP — Former world chess champion Boris Spassky shakes hands with one of the 29 area chessplayers he played Sunday in a simultaneous tournament at Framingham State College.
(News Photo by Tom Zuppa)

Boris Spassky plans a local visit

By TOM ZUPPA

News Staff Writer

FRAMINGHAM — Former world chess champion Boris Spassky, dethroned by Bobby Fischer 12 years ago in a match that gained world-wide attention, will visit here Sept. 30.

Organizers for Framingham and Billerica chess clubs solidified plans for the Spassky trip this week, paving the way for a one-night exhibition at Framingham State College. The two chess clubs decided to jointly sponsor Spassky when both wanted to bring the former champion to the area, said Warren Pinches, executive director of the Framingham Chess Club. Spassky will give a two-hour lecture at Framingham State College, then play up to 25 players simultaneously, Pinches said. He will not, Pinches added, play in the 2nd Framingham Open, a two-day open tournament the club is running that weekend.

Spassky is going to Springfield to take part in a Public Broadcasting System series covering the Anatoly

Karpov-Gary Kasparov title match. He will make one other public appearance during his brief U.S. stay, in New York City on Sept. 29.

Both Pinches and George Mirjajian, president of the Massachusetts Chess Association, predicted Thursday that the Spassky visit will rekindle chess interest in New England.

"You ask non-chess players to name a famous chess player, and they'll say Fischer and Spassky," Mirjajian said. "You name Fischer, and, like Pavlov's dog, that person will name Spassky. Their match is ingrained in people."

Only two other ex-world champions, Tigran Petrosyan and Emanuel Lasker, have ever visited New England, Mirjajian said.

When Fischer and Spassky played in 1972, membership in the United States Chess Federation tripled in one year, Pinches said. But the boom did not last, because the USCF could not handle the influx, he said.

"Now, with the advent of the chess computer, people are becoming interested again. We're hoping to capture people's attention and sustain it," Pinches said. "The organization is there now."

While Fischer won, "Spassky is remembered as much for his sportsmanship and character as he is for his accomplishments at the chessboard," Pinches said.

Spassky won the world title in 1969, defeating countryman Petrosyan after losing to him three years earlier.

Fischer became a recluse following the 1972 match, never defending his title. Spassky continued to rack up victories, winning the USSR Championship in 1973.

Last year Spassky won a strong international tournament in Linares, Spain, ahead of current world champion Karpov.

He is still among the top 20 players in the world, according to world rankings.

He burst back into the headlines a few months ago, announcing he would now play for France.



BORIS SPASSKY
...invited by chess clubs

COUNTY FARE

BY PAUL
DANIEL
THE MIDWEST NEWS

BORIS SPASSKY, SOVIET CHESS CHAMPION, WILL APPEAR AT FRAMINGHAM STATE COLLEGE SEPT 30TH AND PLAY 25 OPPONENTS SIMULTANEOUSLY.

TAKING ON THE MASTER



Former world chess champion Boris Spassky leans on table as he faces Jack Young of Marlborough, one of 30 players he confronted in a round-robin

match at Framingham State College over the weekend. Competition was sponsored by US Chess Federation and Massachusetts Chess Assn.

AP PHOTO



25 CHESS GAMES...
ALL AT ONCE ?!
WHAT'S YOUR
SECRET ?

Chess' Spassky Considers Comeback

By Robert C. Bieard
Of the Regional Staff

FRAMINGHAM — A comeback may be in store for Boris Spassky, one-time Soviet world chess champion, dethroned by Bobby Fischer in 1972 in probably the most controversial and publicized chess matches in history.

Speaking yesterday before a crowd of several hundred chess enthusiasts at

Framingham State College, Spassky said that at 47 he is older, wiser, happier with a new wife and new country to represent, and is thinking about a comeback in the international chess scene.

"Now I want to make some kind of a comeback," he said. The former champion who became a chess master at 15 and a grandmaster at 18 is still considered one of the top 20 players in the world. His

appearance was sponsored by the Framingham and Billerica Chess clubs. After his talk, he played chess against 25 opponents simultaneously.

Spassky spoke about the many changes his life has taken since 1972, when he returned to the Soviet Union a defeated world champion. "I lost status in the Soviet Union," Spassky said. "All of them said,



Boris Spassky

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... Grandmaster Spassky

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"you were very bad." I said, "I am sorry, but Bobby (Fischer) was stronger than me."

Fischer had catapulted the tranquil world of chess into the international limelight through his offbeat demands for playing in the 1972 championship in Reykjavik, Iceland. Spassky recalled the turning point in the matches, when in the third game Fischer "became wise" and gained the upper hand.

"Genie in a Bottle"

"He (Fischer) was like a genie in a bottle, and I opened the bottle," Spassky said. "Something happened inside of me." His nervous energy began to deplete, Spassky said, and his game deteriorated. "A car has gas, and we (chess players) have nervous energy," Spassky said later.

Still, Spassky spoke fondly of Fischer, who, he said, played "for the truth of chess." Fischer changed after the tournament and became a recluse. "I still feel a lot for Bobby from the bottom of my heart," Spassky said. "He has the gift of God and he can't fulfill his duties."

Spassky had been the world champion since 1969, and said he felt relief in relinquishing the title to Fischer. "As a champion, I was not very happy." He said he felt pressure to further the game of chess and to act like a title holder, including "to go around the Soviet Union and kiss some babies," he said, drawing laughs, as he did often in the two-hour talk.

But his reception from his countrymen as a world-title loser and personal problems in his life created a time of great turmoil for him, he said. After 1973, when he captured the Soviet chess championship, his game began to deteriorate.

In the mid-1970s, Spassky's life took

another turn when he left his second wife and began a relationship with his current wife, Marine Stcherbatcheff, who was a secretary with the French Embassy in Moscow. Matters came to a head when in 1975 his then-fiance was asked to return to France and Spassky had difficulty getting permission to marry her.

"Changed My Color"

Before the end of the year, matters were settled and he married Miss Stcherbatcheff. "I left the Soviet Union for France and now I live there peacefully," he said. Until this May, he had represented the Soviet Union in chess competitions. However, matters came to a head when his country refused to pay his competition expenses and denied him permission to visit home.

"So I said I would not like to represent you any more. I changed my color," Spassky said. "So now I am happy to play for France." He will represent France in the International Team Tournament this fall.

Throughout his talk, Spassky delighted the crowd by cracking chess jokes, recalling anecdotes and illustrating his points with broad gestures and a booming voice when he mocked his own thick Slavic accent.

He recalled that his first interest in chess came as a little boy, when he would play with his older brother. His turning point came when his own ability surpassed that of his brother. "Very soon I began to beat my brother, and very soon after that he began to beat me outside of chess," he said.

Spassky also remembered that the publicity before the 1972 world championship match also helped to elevate his own status to the point at which he asked for and received approval for a four-room apartment, a luxury in the Soviet Union.

"I was so thankful to Bobby I was bringing him 20 bottles of vodka."

Chess master Spassky swats players like flies

By THOMAS MORONEY

He walked to the center of the crowded auditorium Sunday night, in much the same way Carl Yastrzemski would trudge to the batter's box.

There was a swagger in his step, grim determination on his face.

"What I do for a living is war," lengthily and exhausting war," he had explained earlier.

At 47, he was a trim 5-foot-10, and his skin showed a healthy tan; it was easy to see his "conditioning and discipline" were paying off.

Boris Spassky was ready for "war."

It was a unique opportunity, this simultaneous chess match at Framingham State College, or "simul" as it was called.

inside out



The only thing close to it may be a baseball fan's dream of standing in for a few Bob Gibson pitches or a boxing fan going 10 rounds with Sugar Ray.

For \$50, you set up your board and matched wits with one of the giants of post-World War II chess, that is, along with the other 28 who paid.

Spassky dropped the red duflie bag right on the floor, yanked out his brown sweater vest, and

while he was pulling it over his head, did a slow 360-degree turn, frowning at each and every one of the 29 local players who had come to get a piece of him.

Gone was the sly grin and comic antics that punctuated his lecture. Gone were his boyish imitations of Bobby Fischer, his American nemesis in the infamous 1972 world championship in Reykjavik, Iceland.

In a two-hour talk upstairs, he had dispelled with great ease the myth that he was some kind of grumbling, dull-witted Russian bear.

"When I started beating my older brother at chess, he started beating me outside the game," he joked.

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But now, just before game time, he changed. This was business. Serious business.

Stories are told about Lee Trevino's hustling \$5 bills on the golf course, putting with one arm behind his back to give the lesser competitors an edge. The legendary Minnesota Fats has his reputation as well. They let you feel you had an edge and then slammed the door in your face.

It was different for Spassky. There was no faking. No courting the sucker. You would lose as quickly as he could make you lose, for, as one observer said, "When a grandmaster does a simul, he wants every game. His reputation, more than in any other profession, is on the line."

John Haines, a 37-year-old Bellingham resident, was typical of those who showed up to do battle.

"Sure, I'm nervous. I studied for this match for four weeks,

one hour a day. I read up on opening moves, so I wouldn't embarrass myself."

That was the main object for others as well. Chances are he'd get you — just don't let him get you too soon or too badly.

At 7:43, Spassky clapped his hands together, calling his prey to their boards. From there, he moved quickly, like a fox, making a play on one board and then going to the next, right around a circle.

The first victim fell at 9 p.m. "I tried to zip off three or four moves, quickly. ... I lost my queen."

Then, five minutes later, a curious thing happened. Spassky resigned to a young man in a brown suitcoat. The latter rolled up his board and left the playing hall.

Outside, he identified himself as John Stopa, a 31-year-old Cambridge lawyer.

"How did you do it?" he was asked.



PLAYING THE MASTER — Former World chess champion Boris Spassky, left, confronts opponent Jack Young, of Marlboro, during a round robin match of 30 players at Framingham State College Sunday night. The match was sponsored by the U.S. Chess Federation and the Massachusetts Chess Association. (AP Photo)

"He realized he would lose some pawns," he said.

Pawns? Those little, insignificant pieces?

There was more to it, though. Come to find out, Stopa is rated a "master," only one level below Spassky and his crowd. He is also an officer in a Boston chess club, "the oldest, largest and strongest in New England."

"I suppose I really shouldn't be here, in one sense. He knew that I was good. I wasn't making any mistakes, so he quit. He knew the pawns would be important later."

Another batch of losers came in at 10.

Then there was a lull. He became impatient with those who were delaying their obvious defeat.

But at 11:45 "they started drooping like flies," and by 12:25, it was over.

Spassky had won 26, tied two, and lost only one — to the Cambridge lawyer.

"An absolutely, spectacular performance," said one organizer. Even the gentle Russian seemed content with his performance. He stood in the near-empty hall, exhausted, sipping on orange juice.

"Was the 'war' tonight successful?" he was asked. He nodded.

"But what about the guy who beat you?"

"Yes, he was very strong. I knew it quickly," he said, then quickly bid everyone adieu.

There was a plane to catch early in the morning, another match down the road, and maybe some day soon, he said, another crack at the world title in some faraway city.

But for now, he could rest easy. Framingham was a good night's work. Only one black mark, and to a "ringer" at that. "You know," he had said earlier, "by nature I am not very ambitious, but this game, it comes very easy for me."